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Fallen angels and flawed saviours: marginality and exclusion in La Vie de Jésus and La Vie rêvée des anges

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Fallen angels and flawed saviours: marginality and exclusion in *La Vie de Jésus* and *La Vie rêvée des anges*

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Abstract

The recurrence of wandering characters in le jeune cinéma *raises the question as to whether they might be considered the cinematic counterparts of the literary protagonists that narrative theorist Ross Chambers examines in his book* Loiterature. *Chambers's study includes a discussion of Agnès Varda's* Sans toit ni loi, *revealing the potential applicability of his theories to the cinema as well.* Loiterature, *drawing on Michel Serres's theory of parasitism, examines the relationship between wandering protagonists and marginality and exclusion, two terms which recur consistently in critical writing on* le jeune cinéma *yet which tend to be used interchangeably. In this article, I will take seriously the distinction between marginality and exclusion in Chambers's theories, using them as the starting point for a discussion of the relationship between space, narrative and marginality in two key films of* le jeune cinéma, *Erick Zonca's 1998 feature* La Vie rêvée des anges/The Dreamlife of Angels *and Bruno Dumont's 1997 film* La Vie de Jésus/The Life of Jesus. *It will be argued that, although marginality and exclusion are very much unstable and shifting concepts, there remains an important distinction between them which is particularly evident in these two films.*

Keywords

exclusion
identity
le jeune cinéma
marginality
parasitism
wandering

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Some ten years after the publication of Claude-Marie Trémois' *Les Enfants de la liberté: le jeune cinéma français des années 90* (1997), the cinematic category known as *le jeune cinéma* remains relatively fluid and undefined. Nonetheless, two terms recur consistently in critical writing on this set of films, namely marginality and exclusion, ideas consistent with a decentralization of the French cinematic gaze evident in the 1990s which saw the focus continue to shift from bourgeois inner Paris to the *banlieue* and provincial regions.[1] This perhaps explains as well the recurrence of loiterer and wandering characters, from the *banlieue* youths of *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (Richet, 1997) and *La Haine*/*Hate* (Kassovitz, 1995), to the provincial road movie characters of *Western* (Poirier, 1997) and *Drôle de Félix*/*Adventures of Felix* (Martineau and Ducastel, 1999), to name but a few.[2] Indeed, the question may be asked as to whether these figures can be read as the cinematic contemporaries of the literary protagonists whom Ross Chambers describes in his book *Loiterature* (Chambers 1999). Although Chambers's loiterly figures traverse a multiplicity of literary genres, there is evidence that his theories are adaptable to the cinema as well, specifically through his discussion of Agnès Varda's 1986 feature *Sans toit ni loi*/*Vagabond*, a film

1. Although the *banlieue* had begun to feature more prominently in 1980s French cinema), it is not until the 1990s that the term *banlieue* film begins to emerge.

2. Claude-Marie Trémois notes *déambulation*, wandering, as one of eight recurring characteristics in the films of *le jeune cinéma* (Trémois 1997: 49–50).

that has been cited as an essential point of reference for 1990s French cinema (Beugnet 2000: 50).

In this article, I will use Chambers's theories as the point of departure in discussing two key films of *le jeune cinéma*, Erick Zonca's 1998 feature *La Vie rêvée des anges*/*The Dreamlife of Angels* and Bruno Dumont's 1997 film *La Vie de Jésus*/*The Life of Jesus*. In doing so, I will take seriously the distinction between marginality and exclusion, terms used interchangeably in much journalistic writing on *le jeune cinéma* where all young, unemployed characters tend to be read as outsiders.[3] Both films recount the stories of unemployed and underemployed youths set in what has become a major site for the cinematic representation of marginality, the north of France. It is precisely the relation between employment and marginality which is the starting point for Chambers's discussions of the loiterly. Chambers writes that he initially wanted to address in his book the privilege of not working, before being reminded that the opportunity to work in itself was a privilege. For Chambers, the loiterly is – in its origins – a middle-class genre which emerges in the nineteenth century since '[i]dleness as defined in a bourgeois context […] was something that had been previously associated only with the lowest of the lower classes, not respectable artisans or hard-working peasants but shifty vagabonds and loiterers' (Chambers 1999: 53). The link between the world of work and loiterature is underscored by the '"time-out" quality of loiterly writing, its failure to detach itself completely from a linearity from which it departs only to return in due course' (Chambers 1999: 32). For this reason, Chambers defines loiterature as a 'distinctively "modern" genre […] of the age of discipline and scheduling' (Chambers 1999: 32), which explains the number of characters whose loiterliness is dependent on departures from standard itineraries. This also means that the loiterly is opposed to teleological storylines, placing its emphasis on digression, on the everyday and on the trivial.

Despite leave from work being a bourgeois privilege, the loiterer remains a marginal figure 'to the extent that social centrality is defined in terms of stability, permanence and closure […] Thus, he [*sic*] is always on the cusp of a dominant social context and its other, always on the periphery of things' (Chambers 1999: 57). The loiterer, then, mediates between different contexts, and is therefore not easily defined in terms of inclusion or exclusion, being simultaneously insider and outsider. This allows the loiterer a special relation to alterity, since wandering facilitates encounters with situations which have the power, as Chambers puts it, to change the subject, an idea relevant not only in terms of questions of identity, but also in relation to narrative and genre. For the loiterer recognizes that no context is the whole context, and that changing contexts often entails generic shifts: loiterature 'mixes genres easily, freely, pleasantly and copiously' (Chambers 1999: 40).

What happens, though, when an apparently loiterly figure is not a middle-class idler taking time-off from a work routine but someone for whom loitering is a routine in itself? After all, in contemporary western cultures, loitering tends to be associated with unemployed working class youths. For Chambers, loiterly privilege 'excludes the unemployed and any others who have idleness thrust upon them unwillingly …' (Chambers 1999: 53) since the disciplinary work schedule – from which the loiterly

3. Although some academics prefer the term 'new realism' (see Higbee 2005; O'Shaughnessy 2003; Powrie 1999), *le jeune cinéma* has achieved greater currency in both French journalistic and scholarly writing, featuring in the title of all three major studies by Trémois (1997), Marie (1998) and Prédal (2002).

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represents a departure – does not exist. Nonetheless, Chambers still reads such characters as loiterly adjacent in some sense, hence his detailed discussion of Mona in *Sans toit ni loi*, a film he ultimately excludes from the loiterly yet whose lead character takes on many loiterly characteristics.

In this article, I want to explore what a loiterly approach might have to say about the relationship between space, narrative and marginality in *La Vie rêvée des anges* and *La Vie de Jésus*. These films display a strange parallelism in terms of setting, theme and narrative structure. In both, a dualism is built up between insider and outsider characters which is disturbed by a triangulation that sees the death of one and the survival of the other. The films begin with first halves which can be read as essentially loiterly, before a genre switch takes place whereby both ultimately follow a more linear trajectory. This involves an appropriation of spiritual narratives and their reworking into what some critics have read as humanist stories of redemption,[4] something reliant upon the idea of changing the subject, in terms of both genre and character.

In examining the extent to which the two films are coextensive with – though distinct from – the loiterly, my approach will be different for each. I will concentrate on the thematics of verticality in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, linked to the characters' angelic trajectories. In Dumont's film, I will focus on the horizontal dimension, the motif of circularity associated with the protagonist's physical wandering. In both, however, there is an important crossover between the horizontal and the vertical, the earthly and the

4. The idea of redemption recurs most often in reviews of *La Vie de Jésus* in particular, hence the titles in *Le Figaro* (B.B. 1997: 'Bruno Dumont, l'ennui et la rédemption') and *La Tribune Desfossés* (Tinazzi 1997: 'La rédemption de Freddy, jeune paumé'). Although rarely explained in reviews, the redemption is presumably meant to refer to Freddy's recognition of the crime he has committed signalled by his tears in the final frame.

Figure 1: The poster for La Vie rêvée des anges.

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spiritual and this alters the relationship between self and other. With reference to Chambers's writing and to Michel Serres's theories in *Le Parasite* (1970) and *La Légende des anges* (1993), I will argue that marginality or exclusion are unstable concepts, yet there remains an important distinction between them which is evident in these two films. This difference relates to the kind of movement in which characters are engaged and the extent to which they are able to shift contexts – thereby opening themselves to a 'subject-changing' otherness. Moreover, the success or otherwise of characters in negotiating their paths of fall and redemption appears to be – in part – gendered, in particular in relation to the forms that marginality and exclusion take and how this impacts upon the relationship between self and other.

Angels and parasites

La Vie rêvée des anges recounts the story of two young, casually employed women in their early twenties, Isa and Marie. The film opens with Isa, a hitchhiker and itinerant worker, arriving in the city of Lille looking for a friend who has since left. She decides to stay in the city where she is forced to sleep in abandoned shelters and tries to make money by cutting and pasting magazine pictures onto cards in order to sell these in the streets. The opening sequences are an explicit reference to *Sans toit ni loi*.[5] Varda's film recounts the final weeks in the life of the hitchhiker Mona and how the residents of the region she visits react to her presence. Chambers draws on Serres's theory to read Mona as a parasitic figure (Chambers 1999: 41–45). For Serres, the parasite has the value of *le tiers exclu*, at once excluded and included, a necessary part of the system which is often represented as external to it. The word 'parasites' indicates noise or static in the system of communication. Since no system can exist without noise, it is not so much an interference but something which is actually constitutive of the system (Chambers 1984: 181–82). Parasitic figures can tell us much about a society's willingness to accept otherness since the parasite is forced to rely on the kindness of strangers, yet hospitable relations can quite easily turn to hostility. Indeed, Serres and Chambers remind us that *hôte* can mean host or guest in French, and that host, hostility and hospitality all derive from the same Latin root (Chambers 1999: 45). Parasitism, therefore, destabilizes relations, calling into question the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion, host and guest, self and other.

The early sequences of Zonca's film are very much readable in terms of the idea of parasitism. Isa finds work at a local clothing factory through initial contact with a Yugoslav migrant, a former outsider who has inside knowledge of job prospects. This is where she meets Marie, a Lille local who has stayed in the same working-class suburb all her life and who offers Isa a room in the apartment she is renting. This does not, however, signal a switch from errancy to stability. As young adults reliant on casual employment, these characters remain in a condition of *précarité*, even more so since their apartment is owned by a woman and her daughter Sandrine who are both in a coma in hospital. Should their condition change, Marie and Isa will be evicted.

In the beginning, therefore, the film underlines Isa's status as parasitic outsider and Marie's as hospitable insider, both metaphorically and spatially.

5. The reference to Varda's film is underlined repeatedly in reviews, including in *Télérama* (Murat 1998), *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Mérigeau 1998), *Les Inrockuptibles* (Kaganaski and Bonnet 1998) and *La Croix* (Royer 1998).

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While some reviews emphasize the similarities between the two (Murat 1998; Royer 1998), it is really their differences which stand out: the more spiritual, elfin Isa has the apparent freedom and romanticized optimism of the wanderer, arriving in Lille as a drifter. The cynical and confrontational Marie, on the other hand, is trapped, unable to escape her own socio-economic marginality.

However, the binary relation between Isa and Marie is more complicated than it first appears. Once the context shifts to life in Lille, it becomes clear that Marie is no more an insider than Isa. The film oscillates between the more affluent spaces of Lille and the suburb of Roubaix, this being one of the reasons that Zonca chose Lille since the layout of the city sees a relatively neat borderline between the haves and the have-nots (Kaganaski and Bonnet 1998). In the film, the particular site for the *mise-en-scène* of exclusion is the venue called *Le bleu* which Marie refers to as 'that yuppie nightclub' and whose name hints at admission to a higher social sphere. The nightclub operates as a kind of border crossing in class terms, with the insider–outside threshold operative not only in terms of clientele but also of staff. The protectors of this boundary are the two biker bouncers who guard its doors, Freddo and Charly, the male doubles for Isa and Marie who fulfil the angelic function of gatekeepers and protectors. Isa and Freddo will later strike up a friendship and Marie will begin a brief relationship with Charly. This is abruptly cut short, however, when Marie meets the attractive yuppie Chriss who is the owner of *Le bleu* and therefore the ultimate insider.

Chriss is the third party who upsets the initially stable relationship between Isa and Marie. In Serres, the parasitic figure brings disorder to bipartisan arrangements, with the triangle being very much a configuration of instability. But there are two triangles here, with Isa becoming increasingly interested in Sandrine, the comatose teenager whose bedroom Isa occupies and whose physical state represents a condition more marginal than her own. This is where the narrative trajectories of Isa and Marie take very different paths, an extension of the dualism which defines their relations. For the first time, Marie is afforded the opportunity of being, in class terms, a successful border-crosser, a taste of bourgeois existence being offered through an emotional and sexual relationship. Yet this does not lead to the 'positive' marginality of loiterliness but its opposite. As Marie falls for Chriss, hospitality turns to hostility, with Marie accusing Isa of jealousy and resenting her attachment to Sandrine, believing Isa to be playing too intently her role of guardian angel: 'Hang on, do you think you have a direct line to God?'

In fact, Isa has become increasingly focussed on Sandrine, reading her diary and visiting her in hospital. Her interest in the teenager takes the form of a merging of identities, symbolized by Isa's writing entries in Sandrine's diary. In a sense, the very first work activity in which we see Isa involved when making cards to sell on the streets, that of *couper*/*coller* or cut-and-paste, works as a metaphor for the different relationships of Isa and Marie to otherness. Isa is linked to the idea of *coller*. Marie tells her that 'you stick to others like a ball and chain'. Isa's is a properly parasitic role, she grows on others, figuring the parasitism which Chambers sees as the otherness within. Marie, on the other hand, is linked to *couper*: she

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cuts others off, even wielding a knife against Isa when she informs Marie that Chriss has dumped her. This is a prelude to Marie's final act, a coming to earth consistent with her terrestrial nature. She commits suicide by throwing herself out of her bedroom window. Isa, however, takes the opposite path. Although we are at one stage given to believe that Sandrine has died, she does in fact survive, the implication being that this is due to Isa. Rather than staying with Sandrine, though, Isa continues on her way, making her time in Lille look very much like an angelic visitation.

It is through these two separate relationships – Isa with Sandrine, Marie with Chriss – that the storylines of the young women branch off, though in a way in which the duality is still very much operative and which can be read in terms of a thematics of verticality. Marie's is the story of a fall, the angel who gets her wings clipped and comes to earth, a downward trajectory that sees her own acts of exclusion lead to her self-exclusion. Isa's is a redemptive story, one not of death but renaissance, involving a parasiting of the other that is mutually beneficial. In fact, Isa is consistent with Serres' writing in which the angel is a specific parasitic figure who mediates between the order of the heights and the chaos of the depths, and who is the very embodiment of duality, being both male and female, human and beast (Serres 1993: 165–66). Isa's loiterly ability to interiorize alterity is evident not only with regard to Sandrine but also to Marie. Zonca himself points to a kind of *Bildungsroman* aspect to Isa's story, being changed by her encounter with Marie, making her less ethereal, more grounded (Guilloux 1998), this change effecting the genre switch from the more loiterly sequences of the film's first half to the more linear story in the second.

The dual narratives of the redemptive angel Isa and the fallen angel Marie follow trajectories mapped out largely through their affective

Figure 2: Freddy in La Vie de Jésus.

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relationships, and in this they appear strongly gendered, along somewhat stereotypical lines. The positive parasitism of Isa's relationship to Sandrine sees the latter's redemption, while the negative parasitism of Marie's sexual and emotionally abusive relationship with Chriss sees her close herself off from others. Isa, on the other hand, takes on something of the earthly Marie after her death, placing her precisely in that mediating space that Serres sees as the true domain of angels. This is never more evident than in the final frames of the film. If the story opened with a missed connection, it ends with Isa in an electronics factory connecting wires to plugs. While Isa's situation is ostensibly the same as at the start of the film, it is in the electronics factory that she is told she has a talent for her job, in stark contrast to her inept needlework at the clothing factory. We are reminded, therefore, that Isa has a talent for making connections; her parasitic relationship to others is one that sparks life, is symbiotic rather than destructive, giving her the loiterly power of changing the subject, both herself and those around her.

Crosses to bear

La Vie de Jésus has also been read as a redemption story, though one suggested only in the final frame of the film, the final stage in a genre switch from the film's loiterly first half to the more linear redemption story in the second which brings together the earthly and the spiritual. While *La Vie rêvée des anges* corresponds to a pause in Isa's wandering, the lead character Freddy of *La Vie de Jésus* – although unemployed – more closely fits the profile of a classic loiterly protagonist in the alternating patterns of movement and idleness which structure his life. While Zonca's film used a specific reference to *Sans toit ni loi* to underline its similarity to loiterly narratives, *La Vie de Jésus* positions itself more subtly by faintly echoing cinematic genres and biblical stories as the others against which it defines itself.

In discussing Dumont's film, I will concentrate on the most loiterly aspect to Freddy's character, his movement in the physical, spatial environment. From the opening frames, Freddy is continually in movement, though he never actually leaves the town of Bailleul near the Belgian border where he has lived all his life. Freddy is in late adolescence and suffers from recurrent epileptic fits. His mother reads his unemployment as a loiterly time-out period: 'for you, everyday is Sunday'; 'unemployment is just a phase; afterwards, it's over'. In this sense, late adolescence itself appears as a loiterly time-out phase, the period before work and/or family commitments – those fundamental to societal definitions of identity – take over. To pass the time Freddy motors around the back roads with his young biker friends; he plays in a local brass band with the same boys; and he meets up with his girlfriend Marie, sometimes to talk but mostly, it seems, to have sex.

It is a pervading sense of ennui which makes the first half of *La Vie de Jésus* so typical of *le jeune cinéma* as well as underlining its affinities with the loiterly. At the same time, the film suggests other, more dramatic, cinematic genres which it could subscribe to but does not, as if to underline even more boldly the apparent loiterliness of Freddy's existence. Many of the props associated with Freddy could place him as a teen rebel. His

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6. The DVD cover referred to from Vidéo Editions Montparnasse, 1997.

moped, which he often rides shirtless, as well as the deliberate crashing of his bike, highlights a certain masochism to his character. Paratextual information, such as the DVD jacket, reinforce this idea, showing a frank close-up of Freddy lined up together with his friends on the roadway, vaguely reminiscent of a teen biker flick.[6] Yet this is not at all the case. The bikes the boys ride are closer to mopeds than Harley Davidsons; most of Freddy's time is spent not in drag races but in teaching his pet songbird to win competitions, and the group in which he plays is no rock group but a brass band, highly traditional – and somewhat outdated – pastimes in a dying provincial town whose apparent innocuousness will be belied by the boys' hostility towards the Maghrebi-French characters in the film.

In short, Freddy is frustrated and angry, but no rebel. Indeed, his troubled expression and stuttering manner go some way in arousing an audience's sympathy in the film's first half: initially, he seems reserved but good natured, caring towards his mother, and he and his friends devote part of their time to visiting a friend dying of AIDS. No doubt because of his age, employment status and illness, most reviewers place Freddy as an outsider with *La Tribune Desfossés*, for example, describing him as an 'otherworldly reject' (Tinazzi 1997).

Yet, within the context of the film, Freddy and his mates are actually a band of insiders who are, in many ways, trapped. This is evident if we compare the film with another genre it superficially resembles: the road movie. As Steven Cohen and Ina Rae Hark have written, movement in road movies is often associated with various liberating drives which might take the form of a flight, or a quest for identity, the need to find oneself by moving away (Cohen and Hark 1997: 1–14). However, the opposite dynamic is at play in Dumont's film as the relationship between characters and landscape is in an inverse relation to the freedoms of the wide open spaces. Like his urban male counterparts in films such as *La Haine* (1995), Freddy finds himself *enfermé dehors*, imprisoned outside, to adopt the phrase used in Mathieu Kassovitz's movie, although the uniformity and lack of articulacy of Dumont's gang sets them apart from the engaging multiethnic trio of *La Haine*. Nonetheless, both the urban and rural loiterers of *La Haine* and *La Vie de Jésus* share an entrapment which is specifically masculine. While female characters find a social function through either domestic or service duties, male characters – either by choice or circumstance – roam the streets to pass the time, with father figures notably absent. The adolescent males of *La Vie de Jésus*, forever zipping through the streets on their mopeds, only vaguely give a sense of freedom in their movement. It is no coincidence that Freddy has a bird kept in a cage trained to sing, since the band of boys we see travelling around in a beaten-up car and singing at the tops of their voices appear, too, as caged creatures.

So the 'route' here is no escape route but is linked rather to routine. Their failure to actually move beyond this area dooms them to an endless circling. Peter Baxter has written that space is organized in the film as a tightly wound spiral (Baxter 2002: 70) and, indeed, circularity appears as a thematic in the film, with the boys forming a tight circle of friends presented visually in a way that underlines their similarity. However, such similarity gradually transforms into an exclusionary uniformity. This is most evident when they play together in the band in formation and in

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uniform. It is after one of their performances that we first see the arrival of a figure who is seen very much as an outsider. This is Khader, the teenage son of North African migrants who first makes eye contact with Marie as she watches Freddy's band play, badly, in front of the café run by Freddy's mother. Like the nightclub in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, the café is a space for the *mise-en-scène* of exclusion. After everyone moves inside, Khader is chastised loudly by his father with Freddy, Marie and the band members seated at an adjoining table. From the outset, hostility rather than hospitality marks the encounter. One of Freddy's friends mocks Khader's father, to the loud laughter of Marie, followed by a joke from another friend, before Freddy himself makes a racist remark. This prompts Khader's father to lead his family out of the café to the strains of a grab from the Marseillaise played by one of the band members.[7]

From this point on, audience's sympathy with Freddy dissipates, with his exclusion of others distinguishing him from the loiterly character that he earlier resembled. Khader is specifically excluded because of his ethnicity and religion. As with Isa and Marie, Freddy and Khader are twinned opposites, yet Freddy's hostility to Khader is in marked contrast to Marie's initial hospitality to Isa. In so many ways, Khader is Freddy's double, sharing the same interest in bikes, and wearing a blue-caped jacket which matches Freddy's red-hooded top. Marine Landrot has remarked that the streets in the town – shot in scope – resemble those of a western (Landrot 1997), and this genre is suggested as well by the dualism between the two, with Khader the wronged loner who stands up for himself against the leader of an opposing gang against the backdrop of near-deserted country roads. Unfortunately their common interests extend as well to Freddy's girlfriend Marie who will eventually reciprocate Khader's advances.

As in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, this triangulation will have tragic consequences, though the narrative trajectory in *La Vie de Jésus* is more stereotypically masculine: the wandering storyline switches to a teleological structure based on confrontation and revenge as the gang moves into a downward spiral, resulting in two more instances where the mob mentality takes over. The first is the sexual assault of a schoolgirl whom the boys – in uniform once more – encircle before forcing her to drop her skirt. The second occurs on a lonely country roadway when the boys in their car come across Khader on his moped. There is no dramatic lead up to what is about to happen, no western-style confrontation, nor any good Samaritan-style rescue. They run Khader into a ditch, drag him onto the road and encircle him before Freddy brutally boots Khader several times in the head. The wronged loner becomes the victim to the violent mob. They tie Khader to the bonnet of the car and drag him away.

It is the dramatic death of Khader that takes *La Vie de Jésus* definitively away from the loiterly. The emphasis is no longer on digression but on descent, the necessary forerunner to what many critics read as the moment of ascension represented by the final sequences. The *bande annonce* specifically raises the question of the film's enigmatic title. Reviews almost invariably pose the question as to whether Freddy is a possible Jesus figure.[8] But if the Jesus of the title refers to anyone, it would seem that Khader is better suited to the role, as the wandering character persecuted for his difference and defiance. Moreover – as with the death of Marie in *La Vie rêvée des*

7. For a detailed reading of this scene, see Peter Baxter (2002: 65–73).

8. It is assumed that the Jésus of the title refers to Freddy by B.B. (1997) in *Le Figaro* and Anne Boulay (1997) in *Libération*, whereas other reviews see the title as a red herring (e.g. Landrot (1997) in *Télérama*).

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anges – Khader's death seems to produce belatedly a change in the subject, Freddy. Following his arrest, Freddy flees the police station to the countryside, where he lies shirtless on the grass, looking up. The final sequence sees the camera in that angelic position between earth and sky, looking down on Freddy. For once, he is overcome with a stillness before he begins sobbing. The final frame, following Freddy's gaze, sees the sun disappear behind a cloud, a stark shift from the flatness of the landscape that has dominated to this point. The stillness, followed by the burst of emotion, suggests redemption, prompting Freddy to turn himself into the police: this, at least, is the standard reading of the film in reviews and underlined by the director himself.[9] In narrative terms, however, the redemption story requires that Khader be the sacrificial lamb. As Noëlle Tinazzi notes, 'an Arab must pay with his life to be the one sent to heaven, placed in Freddy's way to accomplish the necessary redemption' (Tinazzi 1997).

In conclusion, although marginality and exclusion are relative concepts dependent on the shifting contexts within the films, there remains an important distinction between them in terms of the relationship between self and other. These films take on loiterly characteristics to the extent that marginality is foregrounded in the lives of certain characters, yet they are distinct from the loiterly in their ultimate emphasis on exclusion in the lives of others. Isa, in *La Vie rêvee des anges*, and Khader, in *La Vie de Jésus*, are outsider characters who nonetheless show an openness to alterity consistent with loiterly characters. This is evident through Isa's relationship to both Sandrine and Marie, and the relationship Khader establishes with the Marie of that film. Isa becomes the embodiment of redemption through the revival of Sandrine and by taking on a certain amount of Marie's *gravitas*. Khader's death is the prelude to Freddy's redemption. The appropriation of religious symbolism in *La Vie rêvee des anges* and the reworking of religious imagery in *La Vie de Jésus* also change the subject in terms of genre, but this genre shift – so often a sign of the loiterly – has the opposite effect here, since the films' loiterly first halves are transformed into linear narratives of fall and redemption. It is the acts of exclusion which effect the genre switch, resulting in the suicide of Marie and the murder of Khader. Marie and Freddy are the kind of characters who fall just outside the category of the loiterly that Chambers leaves in the margins of his study. Despite the fact that neither has left their hometowns, Freddy – in his constant movement and in his 'time-out' period of idleness – and Marie in her initial hospitality to Isa and her later ability to cross internal class borders – appear to take on certain loiterly attributes. However, Marie's frustration with her failed relationship sees openness turn into 'closedness' and her own self-exclusion through suicide. Freddy never acquires the positive marginality of loiterly figures, refusing from the outset any friendship with Khader. This is how Freddy's constant movement is ultimately different from that of loiterly figures: an apparent loiterliness that moves around but refuses to shift contexts converts the openness of marginality to the closedness of exclusion.

What drives the genre switch in both movies are the different downward trajectories traced by the male and female protagonists. As is typical in the films of *le jeune cinéma*, female characters more readily find a social role through either family relationships or part-time employment while

9. The main reviews which read the film as a redemption story are given in footnote 4. Dumont himself says: 'It's the story of Freddy's ascension' (Boulay 1997).

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male characters tend to be more of the 'no hoper' variety, perhaps explaining their more violent destinies. It is a gendered response to affective relationships gone wrong which propels the descent of the characters in both films, and one might well pose the question as to whether had two female directors been behind the camera, would the protagonists have followed such neatly gendered destinies, in particular Marie whose reaction to being dumped is to seek her own self-destruction. Freddy's response to losing his girlfriend to another male, on the other hand, is to seek the destruction of the other, the end result of an increasingly dangerous masculinity.

As a closing thought, it is worth noting that Zonca had originally wanted *La Vie rêvée des anges* to be entitled *Croix* 'in the sense of a crossing, an encounter, of bearing one's cross, without the mystical connotations' (Ferenczi 2005). In *La Vie de Jesus*, Freddy has a tattoo whose form is difficult to decipher: it may be a crucifix, but it may well be a sword or a knife. The cross, of course, is the classic symbol for the coming together of the horizontal and the vertical, the terrestrial and the spiritual. However, these films, and *La Vie de Jésus* in particular, are a reminder that the cross can have a sinister flipside, as in the *croix gammée* or swastika.

It is also through this symbol that we can see a clearer point of distinction in the way these films distinguish themselves from the loiterly. Chambers's study begins with the loiterly's refusal of dramatic, teleological narratives and its interest in the trivial. He reminds us that the etymology of the word trivia takes us back to the medieval trivium, the three-way intersection that was often a meeting point for shifty characters of all kinds (Chambers 1999: 7). The cross, however, with its four points coming to an intersection, suggests a different kind of meeting place, potentially one where self and other can meet in a mutually beneficial, parasitic relation; but potentially also where self and other might collide head on, producing a much more dramatic and dangerous interaction. It is the dynamics of marginality – the ability to shift contexts and to remain open to a subject-changing otherness – and exclusion – the refusal to shift contexts which can result in a dangerous circularity and uniformity – that are likely to determine the kind of meeting that will take place at the crossroads.

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